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CENTER SCENE

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BLM Bar Codes

Most of us have been dealing with bar codes on a daily basis for several years now. Bar codes are those funny looking patterns of bars and spaces found on items in supermarkets. A special scanner at the checkout counter reads the bar codes and tells the computerized cash register what each item is. The computer has been programmed to know the price of each item, so it prints the item and price on your cash register receipt. Because supermarket clerks don't have to key in the prices by hand, the bar code system is faster and much more accurate.

BLM is now about to start using bar codes to keep track of over 120,000 items of personal property (desks, cameras, calculators, etc.) Bureauwide. Lee Tomlin, Chief, Branch of Personal Property, has taken a personal interest in bar code technology and is very much involved in getting the bar code system up and running.

Lee is largely a self-taught computer enthusiast who frequently uses his PC at home to solve job-related problems. At first Lee felt that optical character readers, which can read letters and numbers directly off a label or piece of correspondence, represented a better approach. However, as technology developed, it became clear that bar codes were much more accurate. Amazingly, bar codes average only one error in 1.5 million scans. By contrast, optical character readers average one error every 500 characters and key punching, one error every 300 characters.

Okay, so bar coding is accurate and state-of-the-art. What can bar codes do for the Bureau? Are they really practical and useful?

Let's look at the current situation. As noted above, we have to keep track of over 120,000 desks, calculators, file cabinets, and other items of personal property Bureauwide. Items are manually inventoried each year, a time-consuming task at best. The process frequently requires two people who carry large computer printouts and check property numbers, locations and property labels. Numbers are sometimes misread or mismatched with the property list. It's not an easy job.

Bar code reading, on the other hand, requires only one person with a lightweight portable scanner. The scanner stores the property numbers and dumps them into a computer which can instantly spot any missing items or mismatches in location. The error rate is virtually zero and inventory time is reduced by as much as sixty percent!

Bar coding is scheduled for implementation in FY88. It's not mandatory, but indications are that many State Offices will opt for the accuracy and speed of bar coding. Lee Krebs, who oversees the property inventory process, and Lee Tomlin will be following the process with keen interest and will provide assistance as needed.

The introduction of bar coding as a property inventory and management tool for Bureauwide use is one more example of the Service Center's leadership role and expertise in new technologies. Once fully implemented, bar coding promises to save both people in the field and SC employees a great deal of time and effort.

Columbian Visitors

In October the Service Center and the Colorado State office, in cooperation with the Agency for International Development (AID), hosted four Columbian Government officials from the National Cadastral of Columbia.

They were here to gather information to assist in the implementation of cartographic and cadastral data centers in their regional offices. They are in the process of automating data to process 400,000 transactions a year. They use the data to provide the current value of land for the purpose of taxation.

The SC tour was coordinated by Jon Abrams who also took them to the Jefferson County Courthouse. A translator travelled with the group. Conducting a tour via an interpreter was described as an "interesting experience." It was like being in an echo chamber with the echo coming back in a different language. It was a "little unnerving" to be speaking and have someone begin talking at the same time in another language. The Columbians were very knowledgeable about the subjects and were quite interested in our methods.

The BLM functions the Columbians found most interesting were digitizing and microfilming. The fact that we have female surveyors was also of interest to them.

The foreign guests visited a cadastral project and a field operation in Georgetown. They also had an opportunity for some sightseeing and shopping Colorado-style.

In addition to Colorado, their agenda included BLM's Eastern States Office, New Mexico State Office, and the American Congress of Survey and Mapping in Reno, Nevada.

Salinity Report

The SC and CSO have completed work on a project resulting in a 43-page report to Congress entitled "Salinity Control on BLM-Administered Public Lands in the Colorado River Basin." In 1984 Congress asked BLM to submit a report by 1987 describing public land salt processes, problems, and corrective actions.

The Report emphasizes that BLM's key water quality improvement objective is to minimize salinity contributions (movement of dissolved mineral matter) to the Colorado River from public lands while recognizing multiple-use objectives and authorized uses. Proper land use, with objectives for increasing ground cover, stabilizing stream banks, controlling accelerated gully erosion, and minimizing surface disturbance, is the BLM's preferred method of achieving salinity control.

The Report was prepared in coordination with a BLM State Office Steering Committee representing the Basin States. Assistance to Salinity Coordinator Steve Vandas and HQ was provided by D-470 (hydrology/soils), D-430 (cartography), and D-140 (editing/layout/publication).

This effort is an excellent example of how the BLM's multiple use mandate can be achieved through proper land use.

Meet Terryll Washington

All success stories have a common theme; an individual decides to take charge of their life, formulates a plan of action, and then struggles to reach distant goals. No overnight miracles occur, but given perhaps one or two lucky breaks and a lot of old-fashioned hard work, dreams eventually become reality.

There are many success stories here at the Service Center. One of them belongs to Terryll (rhymes with Carol) Washington, the Supervisory Data Transcriber in the Division of Computer Operations.

Terryll found herslf trying to reenter the job market after her two children reached school age. Her high school diploma and 12-year-old beautician's license were of little use. After a "hard work for no money" stint in the fast-food business, Terryll decided it was time for a change. She completed a CET (Center for Employment Training) 6-month course in Data Transcribing in just 3 months and then hired on at the SC as a GS-2.

During her first 2 years, Terryll won a cash award for increased productivity in every 6-month award period, the only D-252 employee to ever do so. She topped out as a GS-4 Data Transcriber and then began seeking a new challenge. A year ago, opportunity knocked and Terryll found herself in charge of 15 people as the Supervisory Data Transcriber.

When Terryll took over, morale and production were both low. Terryll's enthusiasm and hard work quickly earned her the respect and support of her coworkers. This past year, production and morale have increased dramatically, with Terryll herself spending about 20 hours per week at the keyboard. Terryll is quick to give all of the credit to her staff. "These people work hard and make me look good. I couldn't do anything without their dedication and support."

Terryll keeps her staff working together and working hard. She encourages people to do their best and pays attention to peoples' needs. Her approach obviously works, a fact borne out by Division Chief Ben Rumph.

"Terryll is the epitome of a loyal employee," says Ben. "Her work ethic and competency over the years have consistently caused her to rise to the top, regardless of the assignment. Our entire organization has experienced significantly increased productivity under her leadership."

Terryll Washington

What does the future hold for Terryll? "I'd really like to get into computer programming someday," she says. "But for now, I want to do the best job I can as a supervisor and perhaps raise our production levels even higher."

Terryll didn't let the fact that she was hard to employ, was relatively unskilled, or had two kids to raise get in her way. She made up her mind to succeed and then did it. One cannot help but wonder what she will ultimately achieve.

(by Bob Woerner)

TIC, TIC, TIC

Do you use microcomputers at home or in the office? If so, the USGS Technology Information Center (TIC) might help you with your project. The Center offers information and training on current applied computer technology. In addition to being able to see equipment and program demonstrations, employees can visit the Center to get hands-on experience with either micros or terminals and attend specific individual training sessions.

The Center was established as a technology showcase to increase awareness of how small computers can enhance productivity. It also provides assistance and training on the use of micros for interfacing with minis and mainframes. The Center is a source for technology transfer among computer users by serving as a catalyst so end users can share their experiences.

Services provided include consulting on equipment, software communications, cost effective computing, techniques, and software and hardware acquisitions; instructional videotapes; information on vendors, equipment, user groups, software and data bases; maintaining a library containing a variety of publications and periodicals related to computer technology.

The Center is available to support all employees within the Department of the Interior. If you currently use or anticipate using micro computers on the job or at home, feel free to visit the Center. It is located in Building 53, Room D2719 at the Denver Federal Center. For information, call 236-4946 or 236-9949.

New Modular Buildings

The Construction and Services Section (D-551A) within the Branch of Procurement is in the spotlight again, this time servicing the space needs of the Las Vegas District Office. Recently, Connie Knittle (Contracting Officer) conducted ground-breaking ceremonies at the Las Vegas District Office for the construction of a 5,535 sq. ft. modular building, which will provide office space for the District's 40 employees. Occupancy and ribbon-cutting ceremonies are anticipated approximately mid-December.

The modular concept is the first of its kind for the Bureau and has exciting possibilities. When the temporary facility is no longer needed, it can be disassembled into seven separate units and relocated to new site locations.

In addition to the above, the newly acquired lease delegation from GSA has increased Bob Leonard's D-551A staff by three staff positions and has added approximately 100 lease contracts. The delegation means an increase in work and responsibilities for the section.

Bob is enthusiastic about challenges that lie ahead. "Each day proves extremely interesting. Getting the newly acquired leasing authority, watching my staff increase in size, and being able to work directly and effectively with the field offices is very rewarding."

NPLAC Here

The SC hosted the Secretary of DOI's Public Lands Advisory Council on Oct. 16. During the five hour-long seminars, they learned of BLM's automation initiatives. Special emphasis was placed on the geographic coordinate and land and mineral data the Bureau provides for the nation. Subsequently the Council passed two resolutions supporting data standards and our land information strategy.